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New Hope Baptist Church

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New Hope Baptist Church

by Alexa Hagin

Although I already wrote about visiting a church from the Christian faith, I have decided to write about my experience at my mother's church yesterday. I choose to write about Christianity again because my first experience was Presbyterian and sadly, very cold. This time we visited a Baptist church and it was there I found what I was looking for. My mother took me, my boyfriend, and my grandmother to an after Thanksgiving Sunday service on November 29th at New Hope Baptist Church located on Blue Ridge Boulevard, in Roanoke Virginia. Located on a large hill, you have to pay attention for the New Hope sign or you will surely miss it. The church meets Wednesdays at 7pm, Sundays at 11am and again at 6pm, and they welcome all newcomers. When we arrived around 10:45 we were greeted at the door and welcomed by many as we entered. I was asked if I was new to the church before we even sat down, and in response I was given a "newcomer's packet" with each item as mine to keep except an informational flier I was told to fill out and place in the offering. The packet was filled with information about the church, scriptures, and ways to get closer to God. The flier asked questions about my name, age, address, and my relationship to God and to the church. I filled it out and waited for the service to begin.

The service began with the church choir singing a hymn. I noticed that each person in the choir was older than myself, and as I looked around I noticed the entirety of the

congregation was older as well. There were probably upwards of fifty members present that morning, and most were either middle aged couples with young children or elderly people. The majority of the member were Caucasian, and everyone was dress really formally. The church itself was beautiful and open on the inside. The pews were arranged so each person was facing the preacher's podium, and there was a lot of space between them. On the walls were flags from other countries and the words "Go and Give Ye to the World." The altar was freshly lined with red poinsettias, and behind the altar, the church choir stood underneath a large golden cross. The inside was the most humble and unassuming church I have ever been in. It took the focus off the decorations of the church or the architecture or the beauty of the stained glass and really left me to pay attention to the preacher.

After singing a few hymns, the preacher left the choir and came to the podium. This really surprised me, as I have never seen the preacher sing in the chorus as well. I was happy to see that he genuinely enjoyed sharing the word of God, and he could sing! He began the service by introducing himself for those of us who were new, Pastor David McNeill. He was an older gentlemen with gray hair and a deep, smokers voice. I later learned that he graduated from Trinity Baptist College in Jacksonville, Florida, with a bachelor's degree in Theology. He is married with children, although his wife was sick and could not attend the service

that morning. He began the service with announcements, as most churches do. He mentioned a fundraiser for the daycare, and town hall meeting after the evening service that everyone was encouraged to attend. He then encouraged us to shake hands and say good morning to the people around us. You could tell that they do this a lot, as each person in the church was up and moving across pews to talk to friends and strangers alike. I had been in churches before where you turn to the left or turn to the right and shake hands, but this was something larger. These people were grouping around and chatting, saying hello to each person in the church before returning to their chair and settling down. We were greeted by almost everyone! Each person came over and shook our hands, welcomed us to the church, and thanked us for coming. Some even asked us where we were from, and what I was studying in school. It was an excellent community of people who were genuinely happy to have us as a part of their congregation. After we said good morning, Pastor McNeill began his sermon, with the talk of an eternal thanksgiving.

Pastor McNeill spoke about his Thanksgiving feast on Thursday with a longing in his voice. He mentioned how when he was growing up, Thanksgiving would last all day. The boys would play ball and the girls would cook for the entirety of the sunlight, and when the sun went down and the food was finally ready, they all sat down and “ate like starving hogs,” until they laid down on the couch at the end of the day with a full stomach. He mentioned how this year, he was driving his mom home around 7pm, back to Radford, at the close of their Thanksgiving. He spoke with a sadness about the brevity of this year's Thanksgiving, and longed for the day when he played all

day and into the night, surrounded by family and friends. We then turned to Revelations, Chapter 21. He mentioned that Revelations means that something is going to be revealed to us, and in this chapter it is the glory of heaven. We read from the bible, learning about an eternal place, like a bride adorned for her husband, where pain and sorrow is wiped away, and you live forever with God. He spoke about a place, made of pure gold, with pearls at the gates, and gems of the most beautiful and radiant colors. He said this place has been created for us with the glory of God. He said that one day our suffering will end, and our trials and tribulations will be no more. We will not weep for those we lost to sin, as we will be lifted of that burden and we will live in an eternal place of glory.

However, Pastor McNeill mentioned that heaven is still a place clean of sin, and those who do not live right by God will not make it to the eternal place of glory. He ended his sermon by stating that he plans to have an eternal Thanksgiving with God. He longs for the day when he can come face to face with God and thank Him for all that He has given. He mentioned that one day, he will sit down with his mother and his father again, all those who he has lost in his life, and he will have an eternal Thanksgiving that never ends. He longs to reside safely in the gates of heaven, with each person he has ever loved. Yet, he is weary of those who do not long for the same thing. He said he was trying to get us to ache for the freedom of heaven, and wish to go to a place like that, but if we do not live properly we will not make it, and those around us who do not live according to the word of God will not make it either. He ended by tearfully encouraging us to make sure we get the ones we love into heaven. Make sure we bring everyone

we can with us, before it's too late, because we are going to need them in our eternal thanksgiving, which will not end with the setting of the sun, but will last through it. •

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